

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Background

Video descriptions are a way to let people who are blind or have low vision know what is happening on screen. Video description is the insertion of verbal descriptions about the setting and/or action in a program when information about these visual elements is not contained in the audio portion of the program. These descriptions supplement the regular audio track of the program.

Some programs aired by noncommercial-educational or public broadcast stations, as well as a few cable channels and satellite systems, have contained video description for a number of years. Viewers can access video descriptions through the secondary audio programming (SAP) channel on a stereo TV set or VCR.

In July 2000, the FCC adopted rules to make television more accessible to people with visual disabilities by mandating that a certain amount of programming contain video description. These rules took effect in April 2002. In November 2002, a federal court struck down the rules. Broadcasters and multichannel video programming distributors (MVPDs) are not required to insert video description in their programming. Nevertheless, some broadcasters and other program distributors continue to provide video description in their programming.

Emergency Information Rules Still in Effect

The FCC's emergency information rules were not before the federal court in the recent action that struck down the video description rules, and so were unaffected by the court's November 2002 ruling. Under those rules, any broadcast station or MVPD that provides local emergency information as part of its regularly scheduled newscast or as part of a newscast that interrupts regularly scheduled programming, must make the critical details of this information accessible to people with visual disabilities in the affected local area. In addition, any broadcast station or MVPD that provides emergency information through a crawl or scroll that appears on the screen is required to alert people with visual disabilities that the station or MVPD is about to provide emergency information. See the FCC's fact sheet entitled [Accessibility of Emergency Video Programming to Persons with Hearing and Visual Disabilities](#) for more information.

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